



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Marketing and
Regulatory
Programs

Agricultural
Marketing
Service

P.O.Box 96456
Washington, DC
20090-6456

AUG 04 2003

NOTICE TO THE TRADE

Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Required Good Handling Practices

Earlier this year we announced plans to require US Department of Agriculture (USDA) or federal-state verification of adherence with the Food and Drug Administration's Good Agricultural Practices/Good Handling Practices (GAP/GHP) guidelines for all fresh products supplied to our program. To give the industry an opportunity to provide feedback, we sent out that notice to a number of industry groups well in advance of the planned implementation this fall. Since then we have heard two principal areas of concern about how we will apply this requirement, and in response we are modifying this requirement.

First, we heard that as fresh produce suppliers almost always depend on multiple growers, not all of whom may be prepared to become GAP certified, it will be impractical to require GAP certification for all of our purchases of fresh produce. We will therefore continue to examine the issue of GAP certification, and will plan to move forward with a GAP contract requirement when it is reasonable to do so. At the present time, we will only require GHP certification. That requirement will be effective for all contracts awarded after February 1, 2004.

(For more information about the GHP Guidelines check www.ams.usda.gov/fv/fpbgapghp.htm or, for information and/or to request GHP verification services, contact Kathy Staley, Head, of the Fresh Products Branch's Field Operations Section, on 1-800-811-2373.)


The second area about which we have heard from industry involves the use of other third party certifiers. Our intention has been to require GHP certification from either USDA or federal-state inspection agencies. A number of industry representatives have asked us to accept equivalent certification from other third party auditors.



AMS - Agricultural Marketing Service
An Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer

This is an important suggestion, and we are open to the idea of accepting other certifying entities. For at least now, however, we will require GHP certification from either USDA or federal-state inspection services. We will do our best to work with our vendors to minimize any undue burden.

Sincerely,



Stephanie A. Wells, Acting Chief
Commodity Procurement Branch
Fruit and Vegetable Programs
202-720-4517
Stephanie.Wells@usda.gov